

Brickbottom ResiStat Meeting Notes January 8, 2008

City Officials Present:

Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor of Somerville
Maryann Heuston, Alderman, Ward 2
Anthony Holloway, Chief of Police
Ethan Field, ResiStat Analyst
Eric Friedman, Senior SomerStat Analyst
Lesley Delaney Hawkins, Public Information Officer

Regarding all of the issues mentioned at the meeting: City and police officials advise residents that, because there are fewer residents in the Brickbottom neighborhood than in other Somerville neighborhoods, there are fewer total people reporting issues and concerns to 311, Police, and Alderman. Thus, if you see something that looks illegal, suspicious, or is a public nuisance, please contact City officials as quickly as possible. Be as detailed as you can about the day of the week, time of day, and exact locations, and if you see any patterns. The more we know, and the sooner we know, the more quickly and thoroughly we can respond.

Sidewalks & Pedestrian Issues:

The most common theme in Brickbottom residents' comments was that sidewalk use is difficult, both for walking inside the neighborhood and for getting from the neighborhood to the rest of Somerville. Residents expressed that these issues seem to be true neighborhood wide: The below notes include comments about Fitchburg, Linwood, Joy, and Chestnut Streets, and the Somerville Ave Extension along the McGrath Highway. Residents mentioned the following things which they say interfere with pedestrian sidewalk use:

- **Infrastructure Issues:** Residents report sidewalks are narrow in places, particularly at the Somerville Ave Extension / Fitchburg St underpass. Residents reported that many of the curbs and sidewalks are not wheelchair-accessible.
- **Business Issues:** Residents noted places where sidewalks have been removed or significantly cut through by area businesses. Residents also said sidewalks along businesses are not regularly cleaned. Residents noted certain businesses that regularly park cars on the sidewalks. Residents reported foliage and fences on business property that lean over the sidewalk and street, or gates/doors to businesses that are left open across sidewalks, making both walking and biking difficult. Residents reported that many area businesses do not remove snow from the sidewalks.
- **Maintenance Issues:** Residents reported that many sidewalks have fallen into disrepair and damage, possibly from cars parking on them. Residents reported that the staircase from Fitchburg St up to the McGrath Highway is the neighborhood residents' main way of getting to Lechmere, which is the closest T stop. Residents said that during snowstorms, the staircase is only cleared of snow because Brickbottom facilities staff do so. Residents said Mass Highway does not clear the sidewalks on the McGrath Highway en route to Lechmere.

- **Routes to Schools:** Residents expressed concern that the above issues made it difficult to ensure at least one safe route for children to walk to school.
- **Equity:** Residents requested that the City make sure that codes and restrictions were equally enforced for all local businesses.

Next Steps for City Officials:

- Report concerns to Inspectional Services, Traffic & Parking, and Public Works to learn of past issues.
 - Investigate issuance of tickets and citations to area businesses and bring data to next meeting.
 - Next meeting: Ask residents to prioritize one particular route to/from neighborhood on which the City should especially focus.
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Traffic & Road Issues:

- Residents requested that the stop sign at the Fitchburg Street underpass should be placed more visibly. They also requested that white lines on the pavement at the stop sign be repainted. Because of the curve and blocked visibility before the stop sign, a "Stop Ahead" sign may be needed. A resident also noted that the pillar in that underpass was recently cleaned of flaking paint and cement and wondered if that pillar would be regularly maintained.
- Residents reported that some areas on Chestnut and Joy Streets seem particularly prone to potholes (potholes there are filled, but quickly reappear.)
- Many residents reported that exiting from Linwood St to Washington St is very difficult – the traffic signal sequence seems to encourage other drivers to run red lights and block the intersection.
- Multiple residents reported having observed trucks from a particular neighboring business driving in reverse at high speeds on the Somerville Ave extension, sometimes all the way from the underpass. Residents believe this is so trucks can avoid driving around the block.
- Residents reported trees at Poplar and McGrath died quickly after being planted, possibly because they were not watered.

Next Steps for City Officials:

- Request that Dept. of Traffic & Parking examine the stop sign at the underpass for possible sign and painting improvements.
 - Research pothole filling data on Joy, Chestnut, and Linwood Streets to see if it is more frequent in that area than in other areas and alert DPW if it is.
 - Communicate concerns about signaling at Linwood and Washington Streets to Mass Department of Conservation and Recreation, who oversees the McGrath Highway.
 - Have neighborhood Police Officer visit business to investigate claims of trucks driving long distances in reverse on the Somerville Ave Extension, and to discourage them from doing so.
 - As a part of the new initiative to increase the City's tree canopy by 20 percent over the next four years, ensure all trees in the City's tree inventory are regularly cared for.
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Crime:

- Residents suspected illegal dumping in the underpass and on Chestnut Street.
- Residents reported that there had been some vehicle thefts and break-ins.

Next Steps for City Officials:

- Continue to respond immediately to any criminal activity reported by residents.
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Quality of Life Issues:

- Residents raised a number of concerns about business-related noise. They described a "parade of garbage trucks" at transfer station in the early morning. Residents also described sounds of what they called "drag racing" up and down Linwood Street, which some residents theorized could be car buyers road-testing cars from the local dealership.
- Residents also reported potentially suspicious behavior of people in cars on Linwood, Joy, and Chestnut Streets: People sitting in parked cars for long periods of time, and drivers slowing down to look at pedestrians, and then driving away.
- Residents reported that during the summertime, a strong smell comes from nearby businesses. Residents asked if those businesses could wash down their pavement more frequently (or some other remedy) to reduce the smell at that time of year.

Next Steps for City Staff:

- At upcoming ResiStat meetings, have residents report on specific times, days, and locations of noise and nuisance activity. Having this information will help City officials focus their response.